

What Remains

an exploration of connections with the dead

Lost Eden Gallery, 2 –31 July 2022

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Foreword

Loss transforms places and objects connected with the dead into spaces of significance for the bereft. Throughout history, cultures have devised various ways of honouring the memory of the departed. The higher the stature of the deceased, the greater the pomp and ceremony. This is evident in ancient burial sites uncovered in the Egyptian pyramids, the Taj Mahal or, more recently, in the preserved body of Lenin laid to rest in the mausoleum in the Red Square. Such memorials mythologise and consecrate/sanctify once earthly beings into godlike figures. But how do the dead occupy our daily life when we are affected by loss on a more personal level? What is it exactly that we are left with?

While with time, the bereft survive the loss, the objects the deceased leave behind, together with places they once inhabited, take a special hold on us. They may accentuate the absence, but this absence is promptly filled with memories that reanimate their presence. The objects and places become conduits between the dead and us. Through these objects, we carry on our relationships with the deceased. Our conversations. Our complaints.

The objects also burden us. They remain. They reopen the wounds as much as they comfort. The past is never left in the past. It is dragged from the shadows, revived and kept alive.

In *What Remains*, Gina Cinanni, Moira Doropoulos, Dr Anna Nazzari, Clare Peake, Dr Alex Spremberg and Marzena Topka explore connections with the deceased through objects and places imbued with their memory. Their responses take unexpected forms. Sometimes these act as forensic-like archaeological evidence, as examined by Gina Cinanni in the rust eaten steel plates left behind by her late father or as a metaphorical vessel of reclamation,

explored via Clare Peake's crafting of a portal that can leave our old selves behind in the hope of a better future.

The psychoanalyst, artist and philosopher Bracha Ettinger recognises that an aesthetic experience can address the beyond of being. To her, it not only gives form to trauma but creates a Time/Space for transforming it.¹ Philosopher and theorist, Judith Butler, takes the conversation further by insisting that in order to mourn, the grief must also be given a form. Butler cautions that while all life can be grieved, who decides it is significant. She speaks specifically about the Colombian context explored in the works of artist Doris Salcedo, where the disappearance of people killed in sixty years of conflict has gone unacknowledged.² Examining what remains, especially when the objects and sites bear testimony to the fragility of lives that once existed, is important. The recent conflict and endless death and suffering in Ukraine make this point uncomfortably palpable. Personal connections and giving form to the unspeakable, act as tangible reminders that all lives matter.

In *What Remains*, connecting with personal loss through objects and places becomes an access point for the intangible. In this sense, the absence that inhabits those left behind creates a space where the past can be revisited and reanimated. What is present in that space conjures up an opening where the past and the future can be renegotiated.

Marzena Topka, exhibition curator

1. European Graduate School Video Lectures. 2013. "Bracha Ettinger. Rethinking Subject through Theology, Psychoanalysis and Levinas". YouTube video, 1 hr. https://youtu.be/hLSxiM_69l8.
2. Harvard Art Museums. 2017. "Lecture – Shadows of the Absent Body with Judith Butler." YouTube video, 1 hr 40 min. https://youtu.be/9o9_ZP2Z7aI.



What Remains installation view. Lost Eden Gallery, Dwellingup 2022. Photo: Rebecca Mansell

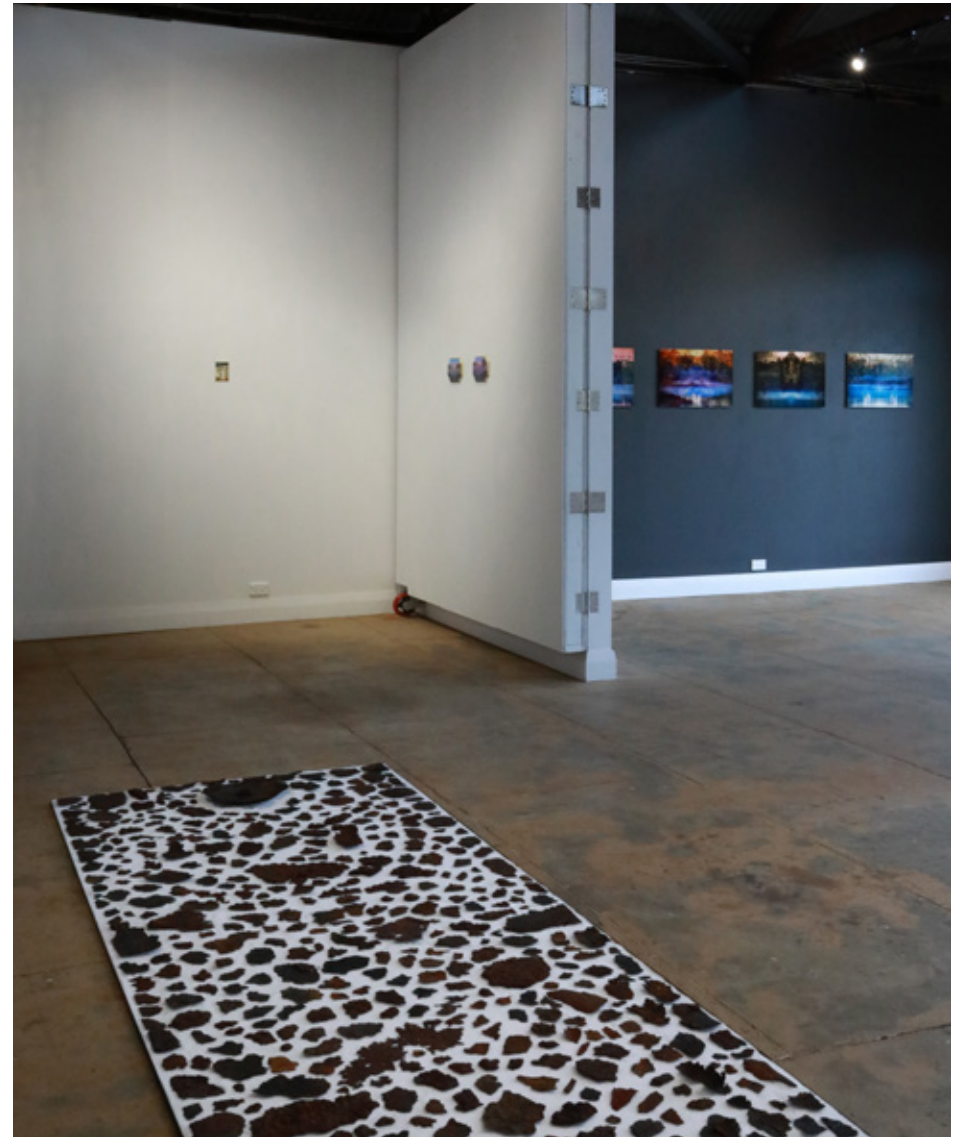
What Remains

When she was 9, my mum's father passed away. He was 79 and had been preparing her for this eventuality ever since she could remember. That summer, she was sent to the seaside for a 10-day holiday and when she returned, her mother had either given away or thrown out a lot of grandpa's things: his clothes, hats, walking sticks, watches, knickknacks that would take up space... his violin... These items—and much else that mum never saw of her father's possessions—would have served as clues to a daughter as to who this man she only knew for a short time was. Much about him remained unknown to mum, and much about him was unknown to his second wife, my grandma, who wouldn't have known what she was throwing out.

For many years, mum was piecing together his life with things that remained. She sought stories to attach to the objects she had from anyone who would volunteer them. Every single item that remained was imbued with story, spirit and place, patchy as it was. Then passed onto me.

Our relationship with objects is paradoxical, and much has been said about it, from psychoanalysis to post-structuralist to neo-capitalist discourses, and while all those provide a solid intellectual analysis, my training in object-human relations, my training in the aesthetics of past-through-object, comes from a deep and lived experience of life-through-photos-and-objects-that-remained of mum's father. Leafing through a book of grandpa's or handling his pencil for me was like touching a relic of saint: a direct connection from him, a man I could never have met, to me, his granddaughter. A spatial and temporal gap awkwardly filled in... with stuff.

This gap became, like Moira Doropoulos' work, unfinished business. Objects that don't look like much to others assume a grander form, and connections



What Remains installation view. Lost Eden Gallery, Dwellingup 2022. Photo: Moira Doropoulos

that are intangible, fraught and imagined become the thing itself. In the act of handling them, one creates something else, a tale spun from a memory real or imagined. Tailor's chalk and thread cutter fit into hands that have moulded to them. The shape of those hands, the form of those fingers, become love itself for a close one. Does a memory of them remind you of a conversation started and never finished? A skill shown, but never passed down? A gentle, loving touch?

I am the worst in second rate antique shops. Every object I see takes me into a universe replete with possibilities and chance encounters: what dreams and hopes did the woman using that stool have, a woman like Anna Nazzari's Gran? Did the man wearing that military jacket ever kiss another man? Did the children who had their Christmas meal off these plates come to bitter blows as adults over some family thing or another? Were these plates waiting for children that never came? Are they lamented in far-away England, Holland, Poland as great grandma's china that was sold in hard times instead of being passed down? At what point does all this stop to matter? At which point do these plates break, crumble and return to powder?

What is the cultural value of any of this? The collectivist in me wants to know how these particulars move the universal, and what value stuff when we, who cherish these things, are no longer here. Letting go of attachments is Buddhism's greatest gift to humanity.

Yet what remains is time, and time moves slowly through objects. Gina Cinanni's fragments of rusting steel and iron don't only take her back to her childhood but also take us all to geological time, a time of base elements, a time before people, questions and afterlife. Chemical elements, fusions, reactions and eons. This stuff right here we are also made of—it runs through our veins. In another form, we use it to build our buildings, make money from, make weapons to kill other humans with and in a cycle of pure human paradox, return a part of the body to the same base element as it. With eons as perspective, death seems miniscule, and oddly calming.

Practical and focused, my grandma knew very well what loss and grief were, she knew their shape and their vastness. Depriving my mum of the rabbit hole of broken memories and incomplete references, she hoped, would

be her gift. Instead of imparting a gesture of cruelty, I imagine her lovingly weaving something like Clare Peake's *Procession* with every object discarded, making an invisible object to gift to her daughter. A watchful eye, and a hope for an easier reality than hers.

We like to mark time. Grandiose or not, gravestones are for the living not for the one gone. They're for the kin to gather, for flowers to wilt, candles to blow out, moss to grow, questioning young faces to do maths in front of. Graves of the quiet, their memory to hold. Alex Spremberg's photographs of the Hamburg cemetery bring the Romantic sensibility into contemporary reality, and seem to ask if another kind of poetry is still possible here? If so, where would it start? Where would it take us? What do we reflect on post-pandemic, with yet another war taking place, and who knows if a new one could be avoided? Is ritual of war like a ritual of death?

In this exhibition of seemingly granule gestures in the vastness that death brings, fragments of a shirt stop me in my tracks. A blue and white shirt of artist Angela Stewart's son, meticulously pinched and threaded by Marzena Topka's hand with horsehair—for he worked with horses—hold me like an object hasn't for a long time.

I know that feeling so, so well. Its depth and precision override any rational thought or practice of letting go of attachments. There I am, a flawed human animal, transfixed by its beauty, its layers, its ability to transcend time, wishing that Heath, and my grandpa, and my grandma were all here.

It isn't things, stuff, objects we want. It is the connection with our loved ones. Be it with our blood or found family, Anna Nazzari with her Gran, Gina Cinanni with her father, Angela Stewart with her son Heath... Objects are cues, mementos to solidify the memory we fear we might obscure with everyday life. Many years after my grandpa died, my aunty made a top for her own daughter from one of grandpa's white shirts that she managed to salvage from the throw-out. My cousin first, then I, have worn it for many years now.

Dunja Rmandić, curator and writer



What Remains installation view. Lost Eden Gallery, Dwellingup 2022. Photo: Moira Doropoulos



What Remains installation view. Lost Eden Gallery, Dwellingup 2022. Photo: Moira Doropoulos

Gina Cinanni



lives and works in Perth, Western Australia and has exhibited in numerous exhibitions for over three decades. Her work is held in the collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia and numerous public and private collections. Cinanni is a lecturer in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University.

p. 8: Gina Cinanni *Tracing Histories iii* 2022. Rusted steel fragments, salt, aluminium.
Photo: Rebecca Mansell.

pp. 9– 11: Gina Cinanni *Tracing Histories iii* (installation view and details) 2022.
Rusted steel fragments, salt, aluminium. Photo: Moira Doropoulos.

Experiencing loss as a young adult, my memories of growing up in a large family were listening to my father's stories – sometimes they were the same old stories – sometimes they revealed something new and unexpected. Then the unexpected happened. Since that moment in time, the concept of loss has been at the front and centre in my work. In the exhibition 'What Remains', my work explores the ephemerality, fragility, fragmentation and preservation of what remains in my late father's industrial-sized shed that has been left relatively untouched in 33 years. As a boilermaker, iron/steel was his raw material and his everyday, both on an industrial and domestic scale. 'Tracing Histories iii' continues to find new narratives in memorialising artifacts from the family home. Excavated and collected from a layer of time these rusty fragments were once a sheet of steel.







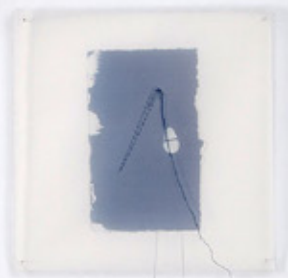
Moira Doropoulos

lives in Perth Western Australia, and is a lecturer in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. Exhibiting nationally and internationally in many group exhibitions, most recently *Transmigrations* and *Maelstrom* both at Nyisztor Gallery in 2021, her creative engagement spanning three decades has also included curatorial projects with a focus on the promotion of Western Australian textile art. Doropoulos' own art practice is informed by an interest in the traditions, rituals and objects of material culture that affect personal identity.

'Unfinished Business' is an ongoing series of work that revisits and reengages with incomplete projects, which have evolved to represent individuals, exchanges and experiences preserved in time. These textile projects and their tools signify treasured relationships and interactions, moments full of life and promise, interrupted and left unfinished. They have been touched and handled, imbued with a physical memory and sensory connection that remains. The time has passed, the projects remain incomplete, representing missed opportunities and time lost, yet in their incompleteness they hold the potential of reconnection and renewal, precious threads that evoke a connection to a person, to a possible further moment in time.

- p. 12: Moira Doropoulos *Immaterial* 2022 (detail).
Textile, stitch, cyanotype. 28 x 28 x 2cm. Photo: courtesy of the artist.
- p. 13: Moira Doropoulos *Unfinished Business* 2022 (series of 3).
Textile, stitch, cyanotype, found objects. 75 h x 28 w x 25 d cm each. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 14: Moira Doropoulos *Adrift* 2022 (detail) from the series *Unfinished Business*.
Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 15: Moira Doropoulos *XXX* 2018 (detail).
Textile, stitch, found objects, mixed media. 50 x 450 x 430 cm. Photo: Marzena Topka.

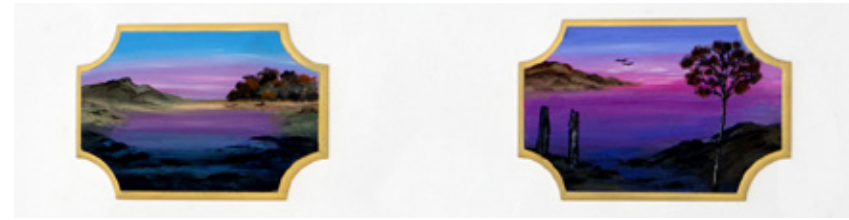








Anna Nazzari



is a Perth-based artist and writer. Her art practice often investigates the human othering of animals through sci-fi, horror and supernatural themes. Her artwork is multi-faceted and can include sculpture, video, drawing and photography. In 2021, Nazzari curated and exhibited work in *Totemism: Climate Altered Species* at Spectrum Project Space. She was also included in the Edith Cowan University and National Art School exhibition: *Darkside* and exhibited in *Transmigrations* at Nyisztor Gallery. In the recent past, Nazzari has worked in collaboration with Erin Coates to produce a suite of Oceanic Gothic films: *Dark Water* (2019), *Open Water* (2017) and *Cetaphophia* (2015). Her collaborative and non-collaborative screen-based works have been shown at numerous International and national film festivals. She has also exhibited both locally and interstate, and in 2020 was included in the prestigious *Monster Theatres* as part of the Adelaide Biennial. In 2011, she completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (Art), which analysed the absurd fate of gender ambiguous narratives. She currently works as a Lecturer at Curtin University's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry, via the OUA Art Studies program.

- p. 16: **Photo of Gran Nazzari**. nd. Colour photograph, 9 x 12.5 cm
& **Gran Nazzari's paintings - Untitled 1 + 2** nd. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 17: Anna Nazzari **Presence Series** 2022.
Alumalux Prints, 60 x 40 cm (each). Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 18: Anna Nazzari **The Awakening** 2022.
Alumalux Prints, 60 x 40 cm. Photo: courtesy of the artist.
- p. 19: Anna Nazzari **Ethereal Dawn** 2022.
Alumalux Print, 60 x 40 cm. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

Gran Nazzari was a mystical magical figure in my childhood. She was warm, friendly, and generous, often sneaking money into our back pockets when we visited her. She was also a deeply spiritual and creative person. In my early years, she would study different cultures, knit us jumpers for birthdays and make us special cakes. Although I never heard her sing, family legend has it that she was a gifted operatic singer. She liked to write poetry and later, when I was a teenager, started painting landscapes. She treasured painting but had the beginnings of macular degeneration, so poor eyesight hindered her progress. When she did paint, it was often late at night when my Pop and Uncles had gone to bed. She was too scared to show her paintings, always stating she was just messing around with paint. To me, Gran always seemed special. She was optimistic even though her life posed challenges, both in terms of the harsh outback environment she lived in and the limited opportunities she received as a result of being born poor and female. She also had a complicated European heritage, cloaked in family secrets and mystery. She wanted to reconcile this part of her life but a fear of flying overseas prevented her from leaving Kalgoorlie. Her landscape paintings often reflected the lost Europe she yearned for or the postcards of the places she wanted to visit. In my house, I have several of her paintings. Every time I study them it reminds me of her, her love and kindness but also of missed opportunities. Gran lived a full and loving life in both Ora Banda and Kalgoorlie but like most woman of her generation, not all of her dreams were fulfilled or all of the questions about her past answered. Thus, my work for 'What Remains' is both a tribute to her love of landscapes and an acknowledgement, that her ethereal presence forever colours this landscape for me.







Clare Peake

(b. 1984 Geraldton, WA) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Art) from Curtin University in 2006 and completed postgraduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia in 2010. Clare was selected as a finalist in the 2017 *Ramsay Art Prize* (Art Gallery South Australia) and has contributed to a number of significant solo and group shows, notably, *The National* (2019) as well as recent exhibitions at Verge Gallery, Casula Powerhouse, Bus Projects and 7th Gallery. Clare has also recently completed residencies at the Jenni House in Whitehorse, Canada and Artspace, Sydney.

Made from found and reused materials 'The Procession (Part 1: Portal)' is a reflective space containing the hopes of the maker for a better life. These are woven into the threads through a slow and repetitive process creating the opportunity to avoid reality and at the same time, meditate on an imagined space of some other more attractive alternative.

- p. 20: Clare Peake *The Procession (Part 1: Portal)* (detail) 2022. Found and reused materials. 100 x 100 cm. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 21: Clare Peake *The Procession (Part 1: Portal)* 2022. Found and reused materials. 100 x 100 cm. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 22: Clare Peake *The Procession (Part 1: Portal)* (detail) 2022. Found and reused materials. 100 x 100 cm. Photo: courtesy of the artist.
- p. 23: Clare Peake *The Procession (Part 1: Portal)* (detail) 2022. Found and reused materials. 100 x 100 cm. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.









Alex Spremberg

(b. 1950 Hamburg, Germany) studied fine art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg from 1972 – 1978 and moved to Perth in 1982. He has lectured in various Universities and art schools for 24 years. In 2017 he received his PhD. in Philosophy (Art) from Curtin University. Spremberg works in the context of an inquiry into the boundaries of painting. His work is inspired by everyday life and investigates consumer culture's economic rationalism while exploring the idiosyncrasies of human perception within the context of a non-objective art practice. His work has been exhibited nationally and abroad and recently featured in the *Here & Now 18* exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 2018. In 2016 he showed an installation of 360 paintings on recycled record covers at the Art Gallery of WA and John Curtin Gallery. He had a solo exhibition, *Wrong Angles*, at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, 2011. In 2004, he was awarded the prestigious *BankWest Contemporary Art Prize* and in 2007, a six-month residency in Basel, Switzerland, and a Creative Development Fellowship Grant from ArtsWA. His work is represented in many

prominent public and private collections across the country, including the National Gallery of Australia; the National Gallery of Victoria; the Art Gallery of South Australia; the Art Gallery of Western Australia; the University of Western Australia; the Holmes a Court Collection and abroad, at the Daimler Chrysler Contemporary, Berlin. His work has been represented by Gallery Düsseldorf, Perth, and Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne, and currently by Art Collective WA, Perth.

Cemeteries are like places that have fallen out of time. Here all worldly concerns drop away; the achievements of goals, the struggle for a livelihood, fulfilment of dreams, all endeavours lose their importance. Here the eternal stillness of death is pre-eminent and artificial structures of stone and steel slowly decay over time and are subsumed by plants and mosses. The world of the living fades into the distance, and another reality beyond the corporeal seems to become accessible. On their visits, relatives of the deceased often place ordinary objects, personal tokens of their affection, at the gravesite. Thus besides the idealised and classical symbols of redemption, we find flowers, candles, lanterns, plastic figurines of angels or ornamental animals that sometimes brighten the atmosphere of gloom and sadness. When noticing the instruments of caring for the gravesites, such as spades, vases, and watering cans we are re-connected with the mundane world of the living. The photos were taken at Ohlsdorf Cemetery, the largest park-cemetery in the world, in Hamburg, Germany. The scarfs are the remnants of my mother, Ilse Scharnberg, that I took back to Australia after she died late last year at the age of 98.

- p. 25: Alex Spremberg **Remains** (installation view) 2022.
Photographic prints on brushed metal and scarves. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 26 left: Alex Spremberg **Remains** (detail) 2022.
Photographic print on brushed metal and scarf, 30 x 20 x 0.3 Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- p. 26 right: Alex Spremberg **Remains** (detail) 2022.
Photographic prints on brushed metal and scarves, 30 x 20 x 0.3 cm -30 x 30 x 0.3 cm.
Photo: courtesy of the artist.
- p. 27: Alex Spremberg **Remains** (details) 2022.
Photo: courtesy of the artist.





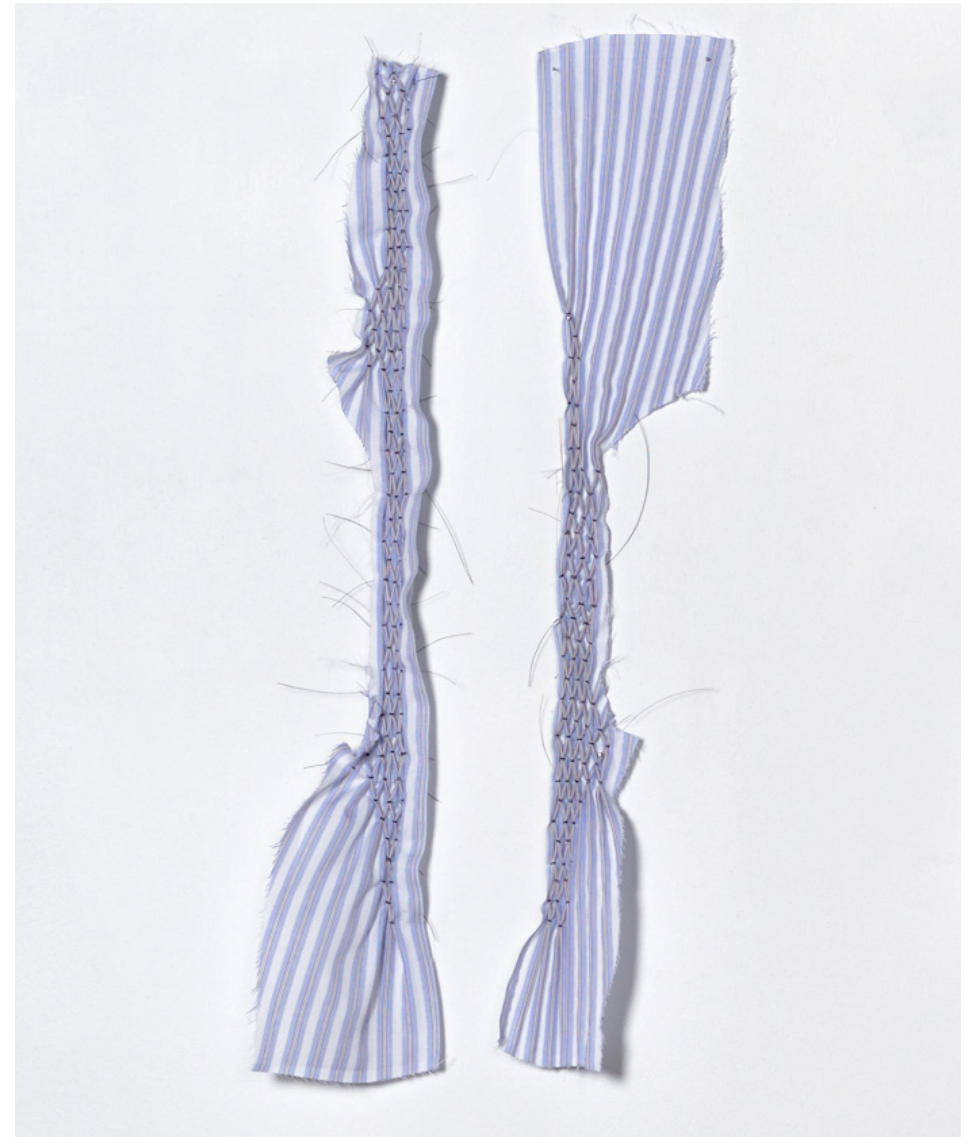


Marzena Topka

arrived in Australia in 1983 from Poland and from 2009 is an Academic Staff member, Art OUA Studies at Curtin University. She studied art history at University of Western Australia (1992) and Fine Art at Central Tafe (2003) and Curtin University (2011). In her practice, Topka, works across various media (e.g. sculpture, textiles, drawing and film), drawing inspiration from irrationality of systems and their failure. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions including *Here & Now19* at Lawrence Wilson Gallery, 2019.

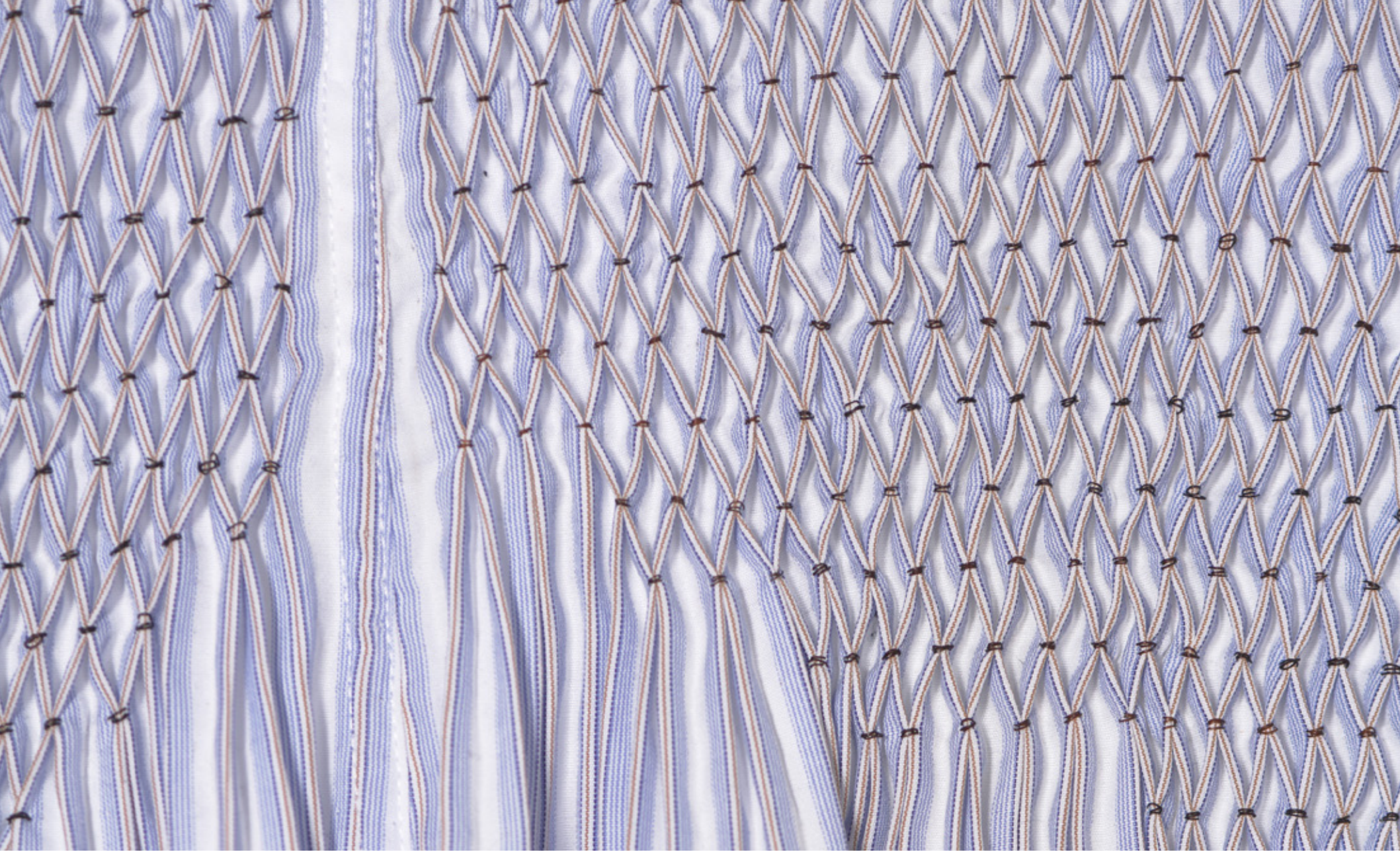
Objects left behind by the deceased acquire a special significance. They become a trigger and a proxy for memories and mourning. Clothing in particular...It is where the body, now absent, is most acutely inscribed. The traces of their wearer are locked into the fabric together with the dust and wind that swept through its weave. In this sense, the clothing bears witness and testifies to a life that inhabits them. 'Coming home' comprises of shirts given to me by Angela Stewart after the loss of her son, Heath, who was a Horseman and a Campdraft Champion. How do I fashion a material that has become more than the fabric?

- p. 28: Marzena Topka **Coming home** (detail) 2022.
Deconstructed shirt and horsehair (6 components). Pleating: Zofia Topka. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.
- pp. 29–31: Marzena Topka **Coming home** (installation view and details) 2022.
Deconstructed shirt and horsehair (6 components). Pleating: Zofia Topka. Photo: Rebecca Mansell.









LOST X EDEN

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The artists would like to thank their families, friends, Lost Eden Creative Directors, Monique and Peter Tippett for their support and Milton Andrews of Square Peg Design for the catalogue design.

